

# QCA as a method for dealing with COMPLEXITY

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# A Rationale

Implicit in most social scientific notions of case analysis is the idea that the objects of investigation are similar enough and separate enough to permit treating them as comparable instances of the same general phenomenon. At a minimum, most social scientists believe that their methods are powerful enough to overwhelm the uniqueness inherent in objects and events in the social world. .... The audience for social science expect the results of social scientific investigation to be based on systematic appraisal of empirical evidence. Use of evidence that is repetitious and extensive in form, as when it is based on observations of many cases or of varied cases, has proved to be a dependable way for social scientists to substantiate their arguments. C.C. Ragin Introduction to *What is a case?* London: Sage 1992 1

# What is QCA?

- Launched by C. Ragin (1987) *The Comparative Method*
- A case-based, comparative method
- Causal and outcome conditions
- Causal combinations rather than independent effects
- “QCA provides analytic tools for comparing cases as configurations of set memberships and for elucidating their patterned similarities and differences.” (Ragin, 2000:120)

## Ragin *Fuzzy-Set Social Science* 2000

‘For causation, the main contrast is between the conventional view of causation as a contest between individual variables to explain variation in an outcome and the diversity-oriented view that causation is both conjunctural and multiple. In the conventional view, each single causal condition, conceived as an analytically distinct variable, has an independent impact on the outcome. In the diversity-oriented view, causes combine in different and sometimes contradictory ways to produce the same outcome, revealing different paths.’ (2000 15)

In other words causes come from lots of things working together and there is more than one way to skin a cat.

# Causes and Outcomes

- For complex interventions in complex systems causes are themselves complex and are also multiple – equifinality.
- The changes we are seeking to achieve are often not incremental – not changes of degree – but qualitative – changes of kind.
- So our outcomes are defined as changes in the kind of the systems in which we intervene.
- QCA is one appropriate method for understanding the multiple and different ways in which we have or have not achieved the qualitative changes we set out to make.